

VZCZCXRO1353
PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #2024 3621824
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 281824Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7417
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1733
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1547
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0970
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1383

UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 002024

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DECEMBER 24 REPATRIATION OF 202 HAITIAN MIGRANTS

¶1. (U) On December 24, the US Coast Guard (USCG) transferred 202 Haitian migrants into the custody of the GoH in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. On December 21, the USCG intercepted a sail freighter carrying 228 Haitian migrants 33 nautical miles south of Great Inagua, Bahamas, at which time 202 agreed to transfer to the USCG vessel, while 26 opted to remain on the sail freighter. Some migrants claimed that the sail freighter, which allegedly set sail from Port-au-Prince en route to Ile de la Gonave, an island off the west coast of Haiti, was lost at sea. Other migrants from the vessel told the USCG that they were bound for the United States. A linguistic interpreter on the USCG vessel noted that most of the migrants were from Ile de la Tortue and Port-de-Paix, located on Haiti's northwestern coast. The interpreter also noted that some migrants were from St. Marc, located on the central west coast, across from Ile de la Gonave. The migrants claimed to have paid the equivalent of USD \$139 for the voyage. The sail freighter returned to Ile de la Tortue.

¶2. (U) Comment. The USCG appears to have intercepted a vessel in process of a smuggling operation. Smuggling people and contraband is rife on Haiti's northwest coast, the origin of a majority of the intercepted migrants. (Note: Poloff noted during the repatriation that regular boat service to Ile de la Gonave departs just a few kilometers from St. Marc, at Montrouis, which is much closer in proximity to Haiti's northwest coast than Port-au-Prince. It is therefore illogical for any Haitian to have chosen Port-au-Prince over Montrouis as a departure point for the said destination. Additionally, there is no existing regular boat service from Port-au-Prince to Ile de la Gonave. End note.) The USCG also reported, and Poloff concurs, that the migrants did not appear to be among the poorest of Haiti's poor. Most appeared in good health and sufficiently nourished. Given the northwest coast origins of the majority of the migrants, their incredible story of becoming lost enroute to Ile de la Gonave, and their healthy physical appearances, it is more than likely that the migrants are part of the usual annual attempts to test luck in crossing the ocean during the dry-season.

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